

BALDUR JONSSON

LEAVES

AND

LETTERS

PS 8519  
0597  
A16  
1918



# LEAVES

FROM THE  
UNWRITTEN NOTE-BOOK  
OF AN IDLER

---

TOGETHER WITH

# LETTERS

WRITTEN IN A CLOISTER  
AND  
DEDICATED TO THE HEARTH

---

BALDUR JÓNSSON

---

WYNYARD:  
BOGI BJARNASON, PUBLISHER  
Printers: Advance, Wynyard, Saskatchewan  
MCMXVIII

PS8519.

0597 :

A16

1918

## PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

FEW THINGS are more attractive in literature, and nothing is rarer, than the ring of originality. So much copywork is foisted upon the reading public—and not always first-hand copies—that a note of originality comes as a bolt from the blue.

What will strike the reader first in the random essays of this volume is the absence of imitation. They are fresh, spontaneous, and essentially wholesome. The style is somewhat heavy at times, but never labored, and in parts beautiful.

The whole was written under the greatest strain, borne with the heroic fortitude so modestly manifest throughout. The "Idler" was no idler from choice, but a man detached by force of circumstance, looking out upon the strife and busy-ness of the world, while taking no part; yet we feel that the smoke of battle, at times wafted his way, was as breath to his nostrils. Fighting a losing game against an incurable disease, looking death bravely in the eye, he confessed to paper the beautiful life-philosophy so beautifully expressed in these pages. His was the philosophy of cheer, of gentleness; his the religion of work. He could not see how that mansion by the crystal sea would make for happiness "unless there be fish aplenty in its glassy depths, and no common fry at that." We can imagine him, propped up in pillows,

a smile investing his face, repeating Kipling's beautiful quatrain—

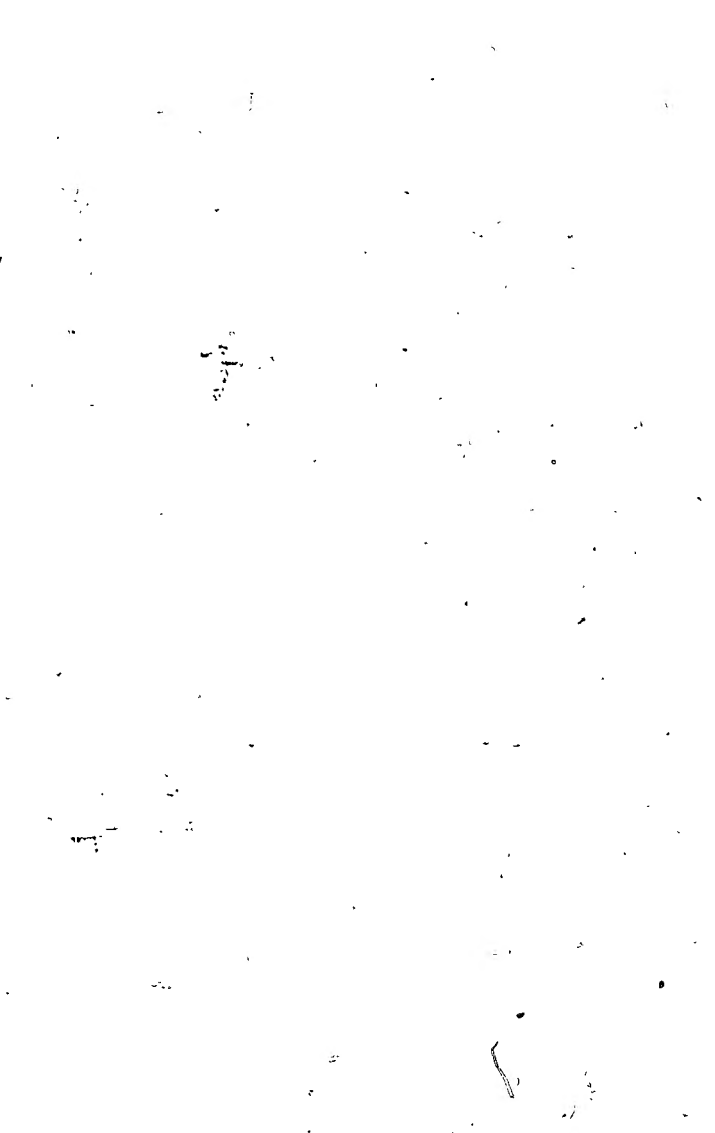
“We shall rest, and faith we shall need it,  
Lie down for an eon or two,  
Till the Master of All Good Workmen  
Shall put us to work anew.”

Had the beloved “Idler” lived there is little doubt that he would have attained to starry heights in the realm of letters. Every “Leaf” and “Letter” is laden with promise. But this could not be: and herein lies the tragedy of his untimely death. Here was a man equipped to live as only one in ten thousand is equipped, and this one the fell agent singled out for his javelin. It is to rail against an incompetent Providence, that such things have to be! The world needs just such splendid spirits to cheer and bless—to brighten the jejune and vapid rounds of life. Yet there is comfort in the thought that a fairer and purer mature soul has never winged its way to the Throne of God.

I like to imagine that instead of lying down for his rest during the allotted eon, the “Idler” is drifting in his boat before a gentle, perfumed breeze, anthology in hand, dreamily floating upon that sea whose waters are the infinite, everlasting and abundant Life.

—BOGI BJARNASON.

# LEAVES





## LEAF THE FIRST

### THE IDLER APOLOGIZES

Heard melodies are sweet,  
But those unheard are sweeter.

Turning over the leaves of the "Advance" last week I was painfully aware of the hustle and worry and busy-ness of this little community of ours. Some had married a wife, others bought a piece of ground, and still others, not by any chance a yoke of oxen, but a chariot, in which to race through the streets and jostle one another on the highways. And I began to wonder whether there was really only one idler in this neighborhood, and whether one enjoying that privilege should not give to others some of the good things he is hoarding. That is why I have asked the editor for a corner.

Fortunately Robert Louis Stevenson has long since written "An Apology for Idlers," and I have no desire to try to do badly what he has done well. Jerome K. Jerome has written "Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow," and that absolves this idler from having to communicate thoughts. — But there may still be some who have no definite idea what an Idler is. I can assure those

that they will not find in these notes a characterisation. That would be the greatest paradox; for an idler trying to describe himself would by virtue of his audacity have turned a busybody. There are a few persons that can, however, be entirely eliminated from that class. The professional gossip; the pink tea enthusiast; the fellow who would sooner polish the bar-room table than the plow-handles; the chap across the street, who simply must read Michael O'halloran and the Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail. These are no true idlers. Least of all the last one. He must be eternally busy trying to spy the next "best-seller," and wondering whether it is going to cost one thirty-five or one fifty.

And just a word in passing about the lines from Keats at the top of this column. The strangest thing about a real idler is, that he is so busy taking his leisure that he cannot possibly attend to the ordinary pleasures of the busy man. Your man of action can, if he tries, snatch an hour now and then and listen to what other busy men are doing: their songs and their frolics; their wedding bells and their funeral dirges. But the idler is often alone with his musings and meditations; and happy, indeed, is he who has learned to catch an occasional strain from unheard melodies, and knows that the great things of life are not heard at the hustings or bartered for in the market place.

## LEAF THE SECOND

### ON READING

When we want to measure the thickness of a hair or the diameter of a distant sun we use instruments so marvellously accurate, that the man skilled in their use publishes the results of his labor with the happy knowledge that he has established truths that stand on firmer foundations than the Alps, and cannot be removed even by the faith that removes mountains. — I once thought that a reader could by sheer force of intellectual activity construct a scale that he might apply to any bit of fiction or poetry and thus at a glance measure its worth and throw out what was found wanting. — This was when I was trying hard to qualify as a professional cynic. The amateur idler (there are no professionals) soon finds the better way, and learns to live with the men and women he meets with in his reading, to invite them to his hearth and take some to his bosom. And happy is the man who has learned to make the selection of his lighter reading an affair of the heart. — Not that the scribblers and book-makers fare better at his judgment seat; for few possess the genius to create, to a bookful of people, even one character, who is real enough, either in his weakness or his strength, in his grief or his joy, to appeal to the heart.

It is more than a year since I last read "The Mill on the Floss," and I hope soon to read it

again. But I can imagine someone asking me what woman that I have met I know best. I might just possibly be found in a mood so prosaic and matter of fact as to prevent me from telling the truth; but barring that accident, I should unhesitatingly say Maggie Tulliver.

## LEAF THE THIRD

### WHO ARE THE GREAT?

Sometimes it is with great reluctance that I use certain words or phrases. They have been so cruelly abused that I feel that they either convey no meaning whatever, or else are more apt to interpret my thoughts wrongly, than to be a band of sympathy between me and my fellow men, as words should. Instead of such a bond the spoken word becomes too often a Bridge of Sighs across which pass and repass ghostly contortions. I am loath to believe it, but must admit in the face of crushing evidence that there still are found, here and there, kind, and sometimes even saintly souls, who score all the little misunderstandings and cruelties of daily intercourse against a depraved and sin-sotted human nature. But why not forget the old legend for a few brief days, and debit some of their hardships, real and imaginary, against our stumbling and blundering way of expressing our thoughts? —It is well to become at times like unto a little

child, even a babe at the breasts, and communicate our thoughts and emotions, not through clumsy and ill-chosen words, but by looks, gestures and touch.

I did, however, not set out to say any of this, or at least not much of what is now on the sheet. The approximate truth is, that I almost started these jottings by saying: "A great man . . . " Then I thought how many different meanings would be read into that, and desisted. Some think of the man of achievement, others of the dreamer, others still of the prophet; but most would probably agree that a great man is one from whom we may learn great things. Each in his own way from his chosen teacher. And that makes the difficulty insurmountable.—From the most humble, the least great man I ever met, or expect to meet, a half-witted old man who could neither read nor write, I have learned some of the finest lessons a man can hope to learn. His loyalty to those he loved was so staunch, his sincerity so transparent. — And the sociologists would deny him the society of all but those whom they adjudge to be mentally his peers. They are quite likely right. I don't know.

## LEAF THE FOURTH

### HORSES AND MOTORS

I doubt if any poet knew so well, and felt so deeply, the great need of the human heart as Coleridge. He had been alone with his soul on a wide, wide sea. Had seen in its naked desolation the heart of man beating out the moments all alone and un comforted. And it is not so much the great passions that count as the comings and goings of daily existence.

O sweeter than the marriage feast

'Tis sweeter far to me,

To walk together to the kirk

With a goodly company.

Just so! With a goodly company. The best things in life we want to share with others. Or possibly better: the things we wish to share with others are the most precious.

There is a danger that in these hot, dusty days of ceaseless progress, of wild and tumultuous restlessness we lose sight of this great, quiet need, lose sight of it, and the means of fulfilling it; but it will still be there. And that other remorseless law will still be there: that the things we neglect must some day rise and curse us.

It seems, at times, that prosperity brings with it a loss of true neighborliness and the hospitality that knows not the merely conventional. Let us hope it is not so, with either nations or individuals. And surely we are not the stay at home

creatures our grandparents used to be. The means for getting about are thousandfold. For the proof we need only put our hands in our own bosom, figuratively speaking. Everywhere the motor car is replacing the horse. Horses have a warm, pulsating heart, and warm, red blood just like our own. A motor is also a throbbing, palpitating thing—but only a thing. But we need not take the heart out of our travels. It is a sad, bad bargain to substitute the temporary thrill of conquest of mere space, measureless yards of sand and gravel and dust, for the everlasting blessing of a true handshake with a neighbor, and the quick fellowship of church and home.—And just think of it! We can enjoy both now more plentifully than ever.

## LEAF THE FIFTH

### MEN AND UNIFORMS

Probably our wheat does not resent being spoken of as No. 1 Northern, selling at 126½, or No. 3 Rejected at 113½, but most likely the little kernels would leap for joy, if, instead, we spoke of it as so many brown, fragrant loaves to the bushels, or so many hot rolls to the acre.

But we can hardly be expected to give up our conventional way of speaking about wheat as long as we insist on labelling every man with some external and irrelevant tag denoting not

his being, but his belongings. We speak of a neighbor farmer as a man who owns five hundred acres, just as if his acres were more a part of him than his smiles or frowns. We speak of the artisan as the carpenter or the steamfitter, as if the eight or ten hours at his trade were all his life, and the fourteen or sixteen with his family or comrades of no consequence. Just as if it were more important to fit steam pipes, than to conduct yourself fittingly in the presence of your wife and children.

No one is treated more cruelly than the preacher, whom we insist on crowding into a uniform. When I see a clerical costume in a railway coach or on street car, I always wonder whether the inhabitant's sermons would bore me to death, and never whether his children kiss him goodnight every evening at nine o'clock. If you happen to surprise your rector in his shirt-sleeves cutting his front lawn, don't tell your friend visitor that you just passed the house of the Reverend Mr. Stearner. Tell him, that this very fine man behind the mower only last spring destroyed five morning glories, just as they were peeping up through the black, kindly soil in his garden, thinking they might just possibly be weeds, and not wanting to take any chances. And he had planted them himself, too.

Should you want to point out to me one of your farmer friends, don't tell me that there goes Mr. Hughes, who owns fifteen Aberdeen Angus



cows all pedigreed, and that ten of them have posed for individual photographs, and six been taken in family groups besides. That will likely set me thinking of the Black Beasts I saw four years ago at the Winnipeg fair, and being fonder of fairy tales than beefsteak I shall next be led to think of Black Beauty, and then of Alice in Wonderland, and from that of Tom the Water Baby and who knows what, all the way back to Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves. In the meantime friend Hughes is forgotten.—Why not say that there goes a man who loves music to the extent of hating "Michigan", who smokes "Old Chum," and has never asked his wife to sew on a button these twenty-seven years they have been man and wife. That would certainly arouse my interest in your friend; at least the last item. I should lie awake nights wondering whether his wife is one of those dear souls, who knows instinctively every time a button comes loose, or whether he sews them on himself, or whether he simply uses a two-inch nail.

## LEAF THE SIXTH

### "FOR BETTER AND FOR WORSE"

The Idler likes to observe from the vantage ground of his bachelor isolation—I almost said insolence—the ways and means married folk find of living comfortably and often happily

together. He naturally also delights in keeping his eye open for the antics of those who are wooing or being wooed. The feeble reachings out by hesitant youths, the reckless boldness joined with perfect abandon of timidity of maidens just out of their teens; the overbearing aggressiveness displayed by the strong man; and the quiet but insistent and terribly effective manoeuvres of the woman who knows whom she wants and means to have him.

But the wedded are the more absorbingly interesting spectacle—if one stops to think. I often think it is an ever-recurring miracle this joining of two lives for better or for worse. The miracle, I mean, is how well after all two people manage to efface, or at least to take the sting out of their idiosyncracies and eccentricities. How they wade through the too often sordid business of every-day existence hand in hand without flinching; and sit together at the great love feasts of life without ever so much as a thought of snatching the choice morsels from the other mouth and cramming them down throat number one.—When I think of it all I feel that monks and nuns, bachelors and spinsters, — spinsters from choice, I mean—must be either cowards or selfish graspers or both.

Possibly it would all be easily explained if those who have had the courage to marry were all perfect, and there was never anything to forgive or forget; and nothing to do but a little

worshipping at the feet of a goddess, or offering up of incense at the altar of an Apollo. But would it? I suppose it is here, to use a phrase of Tennyson's, that "love takes up the harp of life." Very likely a bachelor has no right to get garrulous on the subject of love. But is it not true that life is full of compensations that we forget to be thankful for? And is not one of the greatest of these that we love those who are dear to us, not for their perfections, but rather for their faults? Not for their strength, though we like that to be lavishly displayed before others, but their weakness. Not for what they have, but for what they need.

It is well to end this with a personal confession. If I ever meet a perfect woman, whether she is perfectly beautiful, or perfectly good, or perfectly wise, I shall not—no, never—fall in love with her. Perfectly wise! Horrors! And I only and Idler, with such a small grain of sense, so seldom in evidence.

## LEAF THE SEVENTH

### THE RETURNING WARRIORS

The other day a friend wanted to hear me speak about the War. I am not so sure what he meant or why he asked me, but rather think his idea was to hear how hopelessly absurd an 'idler's' view of a world in action might be. Not

that he had these notes in his mind. What I said then we have both forgotten. But to-day it comes back to me. The Great War does. And as I think of it visiting me with unwonted poignancy I feel like breathing a prayer. Only it is so hard to pray under the shadow of the great horror. Even to utter a moan of wonder and thankfulness, that mercifully we are allowed to escape from the night and live with the day at times. It is so with all pain. Pain is in direct contrast to the mercy of the Lord which endureth forever. There is always respite and rest from suffering. It is not continuous, nor is it eternal.

I cannot but shudder at the enormity of our sins, that the souls of nations should have to pass through this purgatory. It must be some great, unspeakable blot that requires this deluge of blood to wash clean. This deluge of blood and tears. Especially tears. For bodily suffering is nothing when we are face to face with the agony of a soul. When the boys come home we have a cheer and a hopeful word for the maimed and blind; but there are those, who have looked upon horrors, that the soul of man cannot endure, and have come back under a great cloud. When these pass by we merely remove our hat and bend our head.

Yet there may be others coming back, when the world finds rest at last, who need our help and our love more than even the physically or mentally crippled. When I hear of still more of

our manhood sailing from these shores to show that even to-day men are willing to die that justice and truth may triumph, I think not of the number that will find rest in foreign fields, nor how many will return with scars or wounds; I try to hope that none will come back with their souls warped and seared by hatred and bitterness; that none will come back clothed in the pride or cruelty of Mars, but with a heart dedicated to service and love of their brethren.

## LEAF THE EIGHTH

### SILAS AND HIS BRETHREN

I cannot help thinking that the story of Silas Marner is one of the noblest and most inspiring tales of hope and salvation in the language. For of all pitiable mortals this miser is the most hopelessly lost and alienated. He is not only lost to his own fellow men, but for him life cannot have any natural joys. He is the man whom Sir Walter Scott rightly condemned to enter his last resting place unwept, unhonored and unsung. Rightly because he has dug himself in where the rays of God's great sun cannot penetrate. His salvation is always a miracle. The word must not be used simply as a convenient label for hoarders of pennies. The miser may be improvident to a fault. But he is always barricaded by selfishness raised to the nth power. The best definition

I can think of is a man who would sooner close his fist on a shilling for the mere sensation of possession, than give it to a child for the joy of turning tears into laughter. That implies human relationship; and it is not till I love chattel and trinkets more than my neighbor that I become eligible to the dismal brotherhood, where there are no brethren.

A miracle visited Silas and he found abundant happiness in his state of grace and usefulness; and I always hope that all, who have entered that abode of lost souls on earth, may find salvation this side of the grave. It must be dreadful for those to face their last minute, who never felt that they possessed anything unless they had it in their clutch or under lock and key. Possibly that moment is sufficient to burn away the dross of a useless lifetime.

The more generously a man has lived the easier he ought to find the last good-bye to life. He who has found the bread of life in deep emotions rather than in deep sensations trusts the future. But of all misers the most nearly contemptible—in truth the only one, whom I can regard with any more hostile feeling than pity, that he should never know so much that is great in life—is the person who wants to tyrannize over those he leaves behind; wants to impose restrictions that shall asphyxiate the aspirations and fence in the endeavors of those who are still struggling with the flesh and the world.

It is probably a justifiable ambition to wish to have spoken one word or so to be remembered by, done one little deed that shall last longer than bodily infirmities. But I find it hard to forget a few line by Christina G. Rossetti. They may be a bit too sentimental, to have that ring of sincerity and truth, which alone makes great poetry, but they are at least generous:

When I am dead, my dearest,  
Sing no sad songs for me;  
Plant thou no roses at my head,  
Nor shady cypress tree:  
Be the green grass above me  
With showers and dewdrop wet;  
And if thou wilt, remember,  
And if thou wilt, forget.

## LEAF THE NINTH

### ON PROPOSING

I was reminded the other day of a conversation I had with a friend some years ago on the very absorbing question of proposals in general, and, for all I remember, of one such offer or request—whichever it is—in particular. The subject naturally interested us, as it does most young men, either in the abstract or the concrete. I am even told it becomes too interesting at times and am seriously thinking of applying myself for

a year or two, to the compilation of statistics regarding the number of fine boys it drove to drink in the pre-prohibition age.—But let us get at this conversation—what I remember of it. I hardly dare whisper it. My friend said that the greatest compliment a man could pay a woman—any man, any woman—was to walk boldly up to her some moonlit night, and ask her to be his wife. What we had said before his declaration of faith I suddenly forgot after his hopeful revelation of masculine logic. If he said anything more I am not aware of it. I am the reverse of modest, but I admire the trait in others. I was stunned. Likewise flabbergasted.

In the excitement of the moment I thought my friend deserved severe chastisement; at least ten years' penal servitude under a petticoat warden. After a week or two, when I at last gained a measure of composure, I worked hard on the reconstruction of a possible process of reasoning leading to this comfortable theory. I felt, rather than reasoned, that it was all very fine—from the man's point of view. But I was burdened with doubt, when I tried to imagine the dear women as humble as all that. So I gave it up as far too deep for me. Still the subject haunted me, and for a month or more I used to spend a few minutes daily, counting over my lady friends, wishing I might think of one or so, who would do me the honor of feeling flattered—mark the word I use: flattered—should I hint



to her that, as a person of superior taste, I thought she ought to prefer me to all men black, white or otherwise. Yet I must confess I thought of one who might find the subject of matrimony interesting; but her reason would be no preference in men; but entirely a question of aged and seasoned conviction that she had had enough of single bliss, and, like Barkis, was willing.

As I said, this was long ago, and this chat with my friend had not so much as disturbed my dream for years. But last week I had a rude awakening; and now I think I know why the greatest of women novelists donned a man's name and called herself George Eliot. I actually found this in one of her novels: "Deronda was giving her the highest tribute man can give woman." Think of it! He was merely offering himself. I wonder when I can again think as kindly of G. E. as I used to.

## LEAF THE TENTH

### THE SPOOK AND THE BROWNINGS

Last night I felt restless and disturbed, and when I had lit my lamp I could not pick up the novel I had been reading. You may be sure I harbor no vulgar superstitions. Every one asserts his own immunity there. But there are ghosts about, now that the nights are longer, and the moon's narrow sickle meets the horizon just as

the twilight fades into night. Why else should my spirit have been perturbed. Had I been quite sure there were no unseen guests in the room, I should have blown out the light again. But all my expectations were on the side of unwished-for visitations and I dared not trust the gloom of my chamber.

Then it was that, almost before I knew, my hand fell on a volume of Browning. It is not quite a habit my hand has, this touching that volume when ghosts are about, but it often does. I am thankful for it. There are few volumes that are more grateful to the touch such hours. Not that Browning could not call forth legions and make them harass your soul. But I am referring to my own volume. It has the virtue of opening in the right place. At least it did last night. And there were no ghosts around my bed, when I laid it on the table. Of course not! Restless spirits thrive ill in the calm and serene regions of attainment to which Browning guided me.

I must let you into the secret. 'By the Fire-Side' met my eyes when I opened that precious volume. I have no desire to travel with, or to arrive with, the man who reaches the high table-land of contentment by easy stages, and knows not the darkness or the struggle with grim despair. But to know that there is rest and fulfillment of the sorest yearning; to know that those who have known the purgatorial fire of divine

discontent have also lived to taste the very manna of heaven, is no mean comfort in a dark and distrustful hour.

The poem is too great for comment. Too great, I mean, for me to try to take its measure. Had Browning never written anything except "By the Fire-Side" and "Prospice" he would still be among the immortals. Also, Elizabeth Barrett would still command our admiration and homage beyond what her own poetry will achieve for her. This will enrage the "Feminists" and the "New Women." (Forbear with me, I plead guilty to using right here words I understand not at all.) But even they may some day rise and call Mrs. Browning and Dorothy Wordsworth blessed.

## LEAF THE ELEVENTH

### THE CHILDREN STILL SMILE!

It is hard to balance the gains that progress and enlightenment achieve against the wants they leave unfulfilled.—There is the unwillingness to believe in the unseen, or rather the incapacity for seeing anything that is not physically demonstrable.

Think of the angels. How many are to-day the happy believers in celestial cherubim guarding their repose? Where is now the comfort and rapture that must have possessed her, who had

faith in that beautiful story of the angels breathing paradisian music to sleeping, smiling babes? Try as we may, our understanding, callous and desensitised, our imagination anaemic and drowsy, we must first see and then believe — perhaps.

But even if our poor logic, learned with so many pangs and burning of midnight oil in the schools of the pedagogue and the workshop of experience, shuts us out from the facts of the story, we need not let our emotions starve and shiver til we are no longer susceptible of being quickened and warmed by the truth of it. The angels may be flown, but the children are still with us. It was only the other day that a man made the seemingly obvious remark that the children still smile. (I can't recall his name, but think he is the author of something about melting pots and nations.) Yet it was a revelation. He must be one of the few blessed with vision keen to see the miracles wrought for us and on us every day. The children do actually smile to-day, as they did in july 1914. And we never thought of it as a miracle or mark of divine grace; a covenant to a world groaning under a bitter curse. Probably most of us never give it any thought whatever, and always forget to bow our head before receiving the benediction of a little child's smile.

Should we not pray to be healed of that blindness and ingratitude? If it is better to be

loving than learned, then a little child is a better companion than the philosopher. If it is better to live each moment to the utmost, whether it bring grief or joy, than to mar to-day with regrets from yesterday, and apprehensions for the morrow, then a little child is a better teacher than the prophet. If it is better to trust fully the goodness you know, and to shrink wholly from the evil that is manifest, than to seek to measure the depths of perdition, and to understand the attributes of heaven, then a little child is a better guide than the poet. If seeing your sins and recoiling before them is a surer way to salvation than counting your misdeeds and being acquitted of them, then a little child is a better confessor than the priest.

How vain and meaningless and empty our philosophy when confronted with the eternal wisdom of childhood. Just as meaningless and poor as these lines must appear when confronted with the eternal word: for of such is the kingdom of heaven.

## LEAF THE TWELFTH

### AUTUMN

Who wants to be a rock over which the seasons pass, leaving no mark but of decay and age? Better be a tree, even in a desert, and respond each day to nature's gospel of change.

Let varying moods crowd in. Give them a welcome. This is the time when poets indulge in sombre strains, almost bask in gloom and forebodings. Why should not we ordinary folk open wide the door to messengers of autumnal nature, and let them carry us away with them whither they will? There may have been a time when the race lived so close to nature that her influences—the inflowing from her changing moods—held men as in thralldom. But who would not now be slave to the falling leaves, “the water stilled at eve,” the setting sun and the calm moon, might he thus win release from the many artificialities that bind and blind?

We often seem to fear the danger of drinking too deeply of the sadness of the autumn winds. Yet the intoxication is sweet, and the deepest draught can be wrought with fatalities no more dire than intimate, heartfelt understanding of the poet’s joy-confessing:

“A deep distress hath humanized my soul.”

These late September days speak not ever of loss and sadness. Living with the vast out of doors and interpreting aright the voice of the great season of fruition must also yield keen happiness. And it is this commingling of the sad and the joyful, of destruction and realization, of the end and the beginning, of death and life that makes autumn the best loved of the seasons, and gives its passions a deeper value than has the jubilant abandonment of spring. That is

why so many of us count over in our heart the lines from Tennyson:

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tars from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy autumn fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.

## LEAF THE THIRTEENTH

### QUESTIONS

I was wandering along devious paths to-day. Devious paths I mean of thinking or rather feeling. Not that I have come out of the jungle yet; but it is much better to speak as a wanderer not knowing whither the road lies, than to wait till the clear, calm ocean of truth expands beneath the vision. For we are all babes in the woods, and should we wait to speak till we learn the language of grown up folk, we shall never even babble; and speaking, not be understood.

I was thinking of the men; the fearless and the trembling, together under a foreign sky; but all great, lonesome children with hunger in their hearts.

What are they reading and thinking and feeling?—What they read matters not at all—not in itself. Only it affects the other two so greatly, and thousands upon thousands should be reading letters from home. Their

thoughts, even their possible attempts at reasoning out this puzzle, is of little moment. The world was reeking with unsavoury thoughts and decaying mental food before the war. (Was that the cause?) But their affections, their loves and their hatred, they are of eternal import. If we who stay behind cannot keep the hearts over yonder beating with hope and love, cannot help them to remember an occasional childhood prayer, then there is darkness; such crushing, bewildering darkness, settling over the world. How can they know how to die? And dying not, how to live after it is all over? How can they?

I cannot escape the feeling that the great cause of this war has to do with our attitude toward death and eternity. I don't know how, and know I shall never know. But I think it must be there. Did we fear death too little? Or did we tremble before it too much? Or had we simply forgot that there is an end to this road we are treading, and that there is a reckoning and a new beginning? Think of the terrible sleep we must have slept, if nothing less than this would wake us.—Then there is our irreverence. Any fool can say that it is idiotic to stand with heads bared before the unknown.—But there is our irreverence.



# LEAF THE FOURTEENTH

## BIRDS OF PASSAGE

The law that guides the fall of the apple and the impulse that guides the flight of birds, are alike mysterious. But the birds have it. There is a wistful look in many an eye, and many a heart throbs as our summer visitors take their departure from marsh and plain and grove. It must be kinship with birds of passage that makes our eyes grow sore with longing as the hosts pass by.

There is a legend somewhere that man was created a beautiful winged creature. His were the warmth of the south in winter, and the glory of the nightless days of summer in the north. He soared on untiring pinions beyond the loftiest, snowclad peak, bathed in the crystal pools of arctic lands and amid the coral reefs of the Isles of Paradise. Once, as winter drew near, a belated flight of these angel-men were overcome by snow and sleet in an inhospitable region. Then it was that the Lord took pity on their misery. His voice came to them, and they knew how to gather the faded leaves and dead branches of trees to make a fire among the cold rocks, and their limbs were comforted, and their wings grew strong for the flight. As they sped through the night, they heard the moans of their kinsmen, also suffering from frost and snow. In an evil moment they heard these prayers for help,

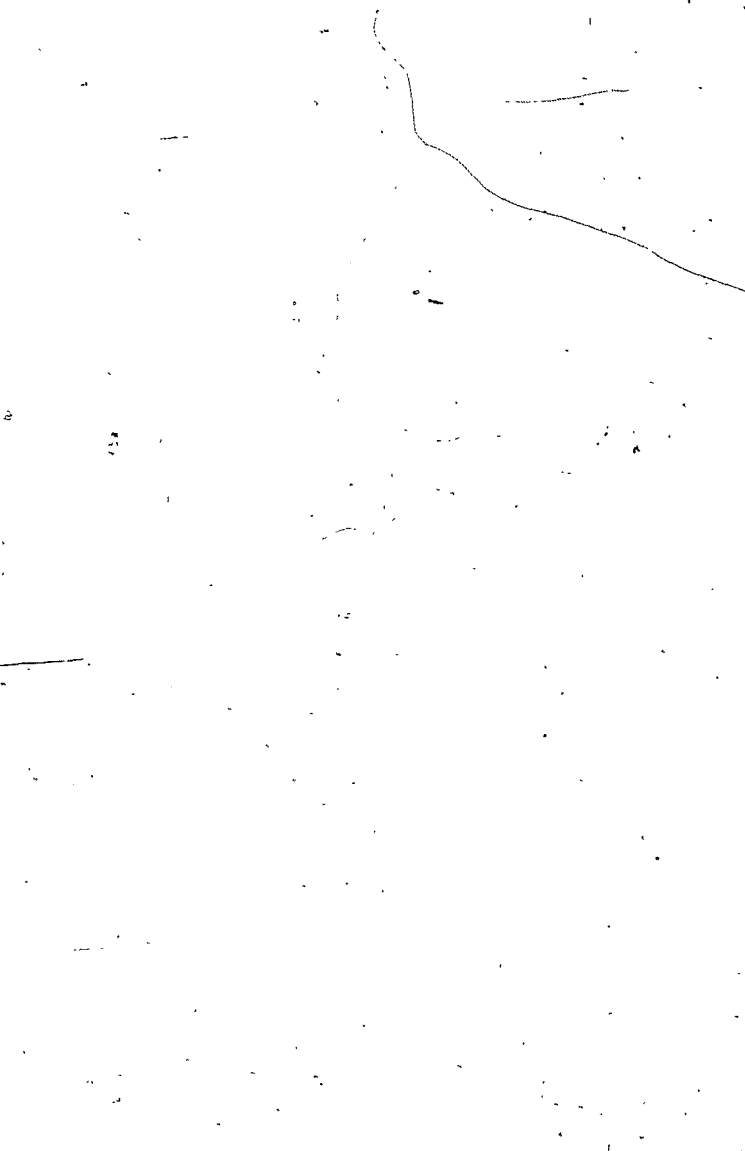
for they heeded them not, but continued their flight to the sunny climes, guarding slyly their new craft.

The Lord was in His heaven, and He knew the thoughts, and counted the heart-beats of each of His creatures. When day dawned the sufferers, who had remained in the north, were by His own glowing fireside. The men had arrived when the sun was warmer; their fires blazed gaily in the crisp morning air; but where their wings had been, were now arms and hands wherewith to toil and spin.

Thus runs the legend. This much is certain, that ours is no longer the autumnal flight. Yet this idler is something of a migrator, and shall now leave the open plain, and the windswept lake, for the more sheltered abode. But even as the wind whistles past my window, my thoughts dwell no longer on the winter that is coming: the cold, white, beautiful winter. Many years ago, by the bright shores of Italy a spirit, tameless, and swift and proud, was released from the bondage of the flesh. A line he uttered will not leave me, but keeps coming back; and his question seems a promise sufficient unto this day and an eternity:

"If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?"

LETTERS



## LETTER THE FIRST

### THE CLOISTER

There is, in southern Manitoba, a shallow valley, that stretches lazily at full length between low, unpretentious, but not wholly featureless hills. A few ages ago, when the prairie was young, these hills had ambition and hope, and a thousand times they told the broad river at their feet, that they would grow up and take their place among the Mountains of Earth. The stream is now but a chain of lakes and the hills have long ago learned to find happiness in the humbler task of giving rest to the eye of travellers weary of the plain.

In among these hills they have built the Cloister.

I have never felt that those communities that dedicated their existence to the idea that the flesh is wholly evil were an aid to the saving of souls. Rather, how the hermits and monks of the early church won salvation in solitude passes my humble understanding. But granting that they did. Did not they pay too big a price? Well, the whole business seems to be selfish to a degree, and it is hard to have to think, that the Lord made this poor body of ours to no good end.

This is no dark Cloister, shutting out the light of day and the breezes of heaven. Nor is its work the mending of souls, but a frail and diseased body. Only one should be very hopeful regarding souls, where the gospel of Hope is preached.

I would have as the motto of the Cloister, "Nor soul helps flesh more, now, than flesh helps soul." That would square us both with the hermits of old, and all the new cults of worshipers of our physical selves.

— You who sit around the home fires reading this must not think that because we have been forced to don gown and hood our existence is wholly drab and void of happiness. Yet I am glad to confess that among the great truths that the Cloister has brought home to me is a keener appreciation of the blessings of the Hearth.

## LETTER THE SECOND

JOHN AND SUSAN LENORE

I often try to think that it is well with the millions that feed on—nay, devour—the everlasting deluge of provender supplied by the sensational novelist. I try to think that they cater but to sensationalism, and not to sensuality. But I lose heart at times, and I think one is justified if he stops and questions the purveyor of fiction, when, going, not into the streets and highways, but to our very hearths, he cries his wares thus—

wise: And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee, go thou and sin no more.

As a sub-caption, this blazons forth the story of one Susan Lenore. Right or wrong, I am not going to enquire further into the story of Susan, than what I gather from title, sub-sub-title, and various trappings introducing it. It may just possibly be satisfying and satisfactory mental and moral sustenance for the youth of the land. But I have sore misgivings.

Nothing in the Bible or out of it could be ~~more truly inspired with the spirit of righteousness,~~ than the story told by John. I should have thought that no one would forget that which we are told there; how in the presence of such great weakness, and so much sinning, even He, who was without sin among them, was oppressed with deep dread and awe. Yet we have here the ultra-modern moralist—don't forget that he is a great moralist—dressing up his heroine, training her to cry in competition with our old friend the Pharisee. She has trod the sordid and pitiful—above all pitiful—path of sin and degradation, and struts boldly into the temple, there to thank God that she is not like other women.

Let us hope she goes and sins no more; but it will be hard for her—terribly hard.

## LETTER THE THIRD

### DEATH: A QUESTION

I aspire neither to the wisdom of the philosopher nor the emotions of the poet. Yet I often wish I could interpret the little ripples that pass over my feelings these calm December nights. I almost think I understand Keats at times, and his blissful misery. Life and death at times do merge almost into one, and our bodily self-consciousness retreats before powers unknown, leaving the emotions in that miraculous state when death seems not a fearful gamble, nor even a beautiful adventure, but the great and infinite rest: as precious as love, as long as eternity; and withal a vast happiness.

Yet I am sure it was not death that Keats was half in love with, but a surcease of physical pain and labor. Rest is hardly what one should demand from eternity. Not at least the rest that means stagnation: That would be Death indeed and with vengeance. — May we not look forward to strife and attainment? An eternal succession of achievements worthy a true man's mettle?

I surely do not wish to seem flippant, but I fail to see how that mansion by the crystal sea, that has been so long recommended by sage and saint, is going to make for happiness, not unless there is fish aplenty in its glassy depths, and no common fry at that.

It seems really more than childish for me to



be trying to speak of the final "Halt!", and of the great new beginning, at this time; almost irreverent, with the great stage set over there in Europe, and the curtain up day and night. I take it that we will have many things to learn, when the boys come back; and many we would be learning now had we our eyes open: Not the least of these a wiser and braver attitude toward death, and a more virile conception of eternity.

## LETTER THE FOURTH

BOB CRATCHIT

When I found the **Christmas Carol**, — it may have been the first time I read it, yet I think it was my second reading,—but when I found the **Christmas Carol** I looked forward to at least one reading every year. Confess I must, that I have disappointed those good spirits, who then whispered to me, promising new and renewed pleasure each reading. But not this winter; and surely it is a fine, inspired bit of gospel for a cold December morning.

I laid it aside four or five days ago. But of course it is still with me. These are the flittering shadows of old Fezziwig and the merry dancers, of Scrooge's nephew and Serooge's niece, by marriage, the sisters of Scrooge's niece, by marriage and the rest. But Bob and his family are no empty phantoms. They come trooping to my

heart, even as they came to the great, tender heart of Dickens, Tiny Tim leading them all, with the password he needs must find every heart open and glad to make them welcome; not only Tiny Tim and the young Cratchits, and Master Peter and Martha, but Mrs. Cratchit so brave in ribbons, and Bob with his three feet of comforter. Yes, Bob almost above the others, comforter and all.

A true Christmas Carol it is, that opens every bosom and makes broad the way for those we hold dear to enter; for great love and tenderness to enter; for joy and the spirit of thankfulness to enter: makes broad the way for all those we know, and all those we don't know, to enter and make merry within till second links with second in a great song, at once sad and pious, both pleading and triumphant; even as that great benediction pronounced by the high priest of Bob Cratchit's sacred temple.

Let us recall the text:

Then Bob proposed:

"A merry Christmas to us all,  
my dears, and God bless us!"

Which all the family re-echoed.

"God bless us, every one!"  
said Tiny Tim the last of all.

## LETTER THE FIFTH

### NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

New Year Resolutions, abstinence during Lent from the awful art of dancing, and the ban on Sunday card playing, these, and the eating of olives I am always inclined to place in one category; they are very fine, provided that one has acquired a taste for them. I for instance like olives, in fact I should blush to tell how many I had on Christmas Day. The others I like not at all. Must modify that, though, for no President could be more neutral than I am in the matter of lenten dancing, now that my old dancing shoes are serving as bed-room slippers and otherwise making themselves generally useful.—

When it comes to New Year Resolutions there is not a tinge of neutrality about me, not even a tender shoot that might grow if petted and cherished. Should one of these walk into my study on the last of the year, wishing to be adopted, I would be obdurate; more than that, my feet would ache to kick it out of doors, bag and baggage, and the colder the night, the better I should like it.

Not that I can tell why or when I became so filled with wrath and ill will toward the thing. About my twentieth year I had friendly relations with it. Possibly it had something to do with Free Will. Not that I know what the Psychologists mean when they speak of free will—or even

whether they speak of it at all—, nor care a straw what the Theologians read into that pet phrase of theirs. As I was saying, I don't care to take my antagonism to a scientist to be labelled or to priest to be named and dedicated, but somehow I have felt it to be better for my manhood to face each day freshly, than to call together all my failings and struggles, real and imaginary, slay them with a big blow, and bury them with a two-mile procession on January the first. They would be sure to reappear in any case on the New Year, and all the odds are in favor of fighting the real living things, rather than the ghosts of things proudly dismissed and buried.

## LETTER THE SIXTH

### THE BIGGEST FEAST OF ALL

This letter is apt to betray reaction, for now that I take up my pencil I don't know where it is going to lead me. Not that I practise writing with the psychological researchers. Must say I am egoistic enough to think that the result is likely to be more satisfactory, on the whole, with the orders coming from the home cranium, than should some one out in the wide, wide space surrounding us and other astronomical atoms hold the control levers.

You know how welcome rest is after the holidays. Even in a Cloister. No one ever

heard of cloister folk fasting at this festive season—or at least I have not, which amounts to the same thing just now—and two super-human dinners within eight days is really too much.—The truth is, That I don't see why they keep those same people at the calendar industry year after year, and don't get in a more progressive lot—as the reformers say—willing to give us at least a month between Christmas and New Year.

There is more to this reaction, though, than mere physical exhaustion, and I should be doing neither you nor myself justice if I refused to admit it. Yet unless you are initiated there is little use telling you, for space does not allow nor have I the courage to take upon these shoulders the mantle of the book reviewer. The biggest feast of all was "Mr. Britling Sees it through," which a kind and discerning friend sent along.

Some books that wander my way I want to use as a discus, and nothing but tender regard for the big family of books saves them from an unkindly fate. This book gripped and held me, and so it must every reader, irresistibly and to the end. Not that you are likely to take it all at a reading, or even stay with it hours at a time. At least I could not. Thoughts crowded in too swiftly. Problems were thrown at me too mercilessly. I lost my anchorage and drifted on these tumultuous seas.—I am still lost.

Just such books we need to shake us out of

our complacency and mental sloth. I am now resting, but I hope to wrestle with it later. In the meantime I am soothed and comforted by that inimitable ending. Only a master would dare end a great book with these simple lines:

"From away towards the church came" the sound of some early worker whetting a scythe."

## LETTER THE SEVENTH

### "WAYFARER'S LIBRARY"

This morning I felt like a school boy with a new toy. I got a small parcel of books last night, among them a volume of the Essays of Elia. It may seem strange that I should never have read those Essays. Well, it may, but that is not the point. It is not precisely the contents—however much I anticipate pleasure in dipping into them—but it is the joy of touching and turning over in the hand an object of love; might well say reverence. I have seen old people pet and fondle the homliest and commonest things just like that. An old spinning wheel, for instance, or a tobacco pouch.

Thus our best feelings about books will out on occasions. And this is not a flashy or a ponderous tome shouting for notice, nor a pampered aristocrat cuddling up to you in velvet covers. It is very neatly and trimly dressed in every-day garb at thirty cents the covers, the

paper and the letter press: the soul of it in the bargain if you have the cunning to find it.

And think of the pen and ink sketches thrown in with such little ado! Just as if the the publisher—I should like to think of a word smelling less of printer's ink—did not know how little one is supposed to give for a shilling.

But I have seen his picture somewhere, and from the homespun, kindly, granddaddy look of it—I am sure he is a lover of just such books,—and such generous putting of personality into the very factory stuff. I take it that his heart swells with pride, nay, throbs with happiness, every time he thinks of the millions he is helping to priceless cheap books. Cheap! Yes, cheap at the price of a year or two of a man's life some of them. Why not? Have they not cost their authors more than that? Not counting the despair of the books that wanted to be born and never were.

The name of this little Library, too! Way-farer's Library.

Way-farer's Library. There is enough poetry there for an hour's musing. That is if you take (as Mr. Grayson took the Spirit to church with him) some along with you to that rendezvous with the Muses.

## LETTER THE EIGHTH

### A WHIST DRIVE

As you all know this is what you might call a secular, not to say profane, cloister. That accounts for what we were up to last night. A Whist Drive. To you a whist drive might be a mystery; and you are wrong in thinking it is a whist that is driven. Nothing of the sort. The whist goes most leisurely, and takes naps at every turn. It is the whist that does the driving. Last night it drove me twice around our spacious recreation hall.

That was quite pardonable, as I met several intelligent and amiable young ladies on my travels; but the driving ended in disaster and gnashing of teeth, for I was finally driven—shall I breathe it—to the hoodoo table and black despair.

What is a hoodoo table? you ask. Your curiosity is natural, yet I must not try to satisfy it, for that might prove this a profane place indeed. But I will try to tell you in parliamentary utterances some of the things that befell me there. Yes. I'll try to be calm.

I had been holding most extraordinary cards and moving up in an approved fashion. I was getting too proud. Hence the fall. Here I was up against Miss Nippersole. Miss Nippersole told me very calmly, that she had been there five rounds already and didn't even have the



grace to say she hoped I would help her to promotion. I bit my lip.

It was Miss N's lead and in five minutes she discovered that both tactics and strategy demanded that she should play the jack of diamonds. I presume because it was the highest of four she held.

Needless to say, that went to the lady sitting on my left. She out with a promising heart. Things were deepening, and I breathed a silent wish, that the German Chancellor had taken as long to decide whether to send his first ultimatum. Finally the ultimatum came in the form of a little club. This was trumps. We played on in grim silence, till Miss N. informed us in the most pleasant and irritating way what she had suddenly discovered that she had a heart. I suddenly discovered that I hated puns.

But this was not the end of my troubles. Naturally Miss N. and I stayed.

There would be change of partners and I would have a chance of getting something living. I was doomed; "Mike" was coming. M. is not exactly a lady, but he took the place of one last night. His name is not "Mike," but Sokoloff Balagrowski. "Mike" is shorter.

The cards were dealt and M. discovered two things. First: he had five trumps. Second: he had ambition. I believe he saw visions; possibly he had read about Brewster's millions. His turn came and he soon exhausted our supply of

trumps. He still had one or two left. Wouldn't he make good use of them! Shortly after Miss N. leads the five of hearts; I play ace, Miss N's partner six,—a moment of indecision, and down comes partner M. with his trump, ambition beaming in his face.

I am in bed to-day.

## LETTER THE NINTH

### THE INVALID

Perhaps it was the war at first,—the sequence of thought would be natural — perhaps it was something else, but before I went to sleep, after a long gray hour under the mocking leer of a shrouded quarter moon, I was thinking about the invalid: the invalid as a species. At times I think I know the meaning of the word as well as any dictionary, but I looked it up this morning. I soon found it: invalid, adj., without value. That is the first interpretation, and the best, I wager. Later on they give a noun: a sickly person. That's capital. Not sick, only sickly. In other words: as the real neutral is mentally and emotionally an invalid, so the invalid is physically and in the currency of the world a neutral. That is to say, without value.

When I was younger, and of a more diffusively sentimental turn of mind, I often conjured up for my own entertainment in moments of ill

humor a picture of myself on a bed, sick even unto death, chamber darkened, voices hushed, soft feet and softer hands, waiting on my most unreasonable whim. Then it would all be over, and friends take their departure to an early, but honored grave. The seemingly universal desire for someone to follow your dust with wailing and tears is, I take it, the most selfish and at the same time the most primitive, not to say savage, wish of man.

These anticipations of the pleasures of sickness have little of truth to recommend them, yet the sick man's portion seems to be more easy to bear, than that of the "sickly" one. At least there is a difference.

The sick man has his mental faculties distorted and out of focus and playing him all sorts of diverting pranks. Your invalid is sensible of what the world is doing, yet can take no part. To the sick man remains hopeful prayer for relief or release. Your invalid, if he be a praying man (and may God grant him that he is), can only pray that his heart may be kept loving and grateful, and that he may never become bitter against fate and circumstance. The sick man may look forward to useful toil. To the invalid spring may return, but no plough to follow; summer, but no flower of his own planting to tend; autumn, but no reaping or bringing in of sheaves; winter, but no fire-side that he may call his own. To the sick, bed is a

haven of rest; to the invalid it becomes the hated emblem of monotony.

But it is this very loneliness which abides with him to bless him. He can prove his friends. It is easy enough to tip-toe through a sick room for a fortnight or a month, and to shed a few decent tears at a bier; but the joyful service, the invalid's friends, these rise like incense to the throne of God and make Him glad.

## LETTER THE TENTH

### THE LEGEND OF ASLAUG

We have a musical instrument of a sort out in the sitting room. I never know rightly what name to give it, or whether either "musical" or "instrumental" may be applied to it correctly; but I hear them call it a Victrola, and that should be good enough for this pen. Whatever mystery may attach to the name, the workings of the thing are to me a far greater wonder. There it stands like any other sedate, respectable box; but when they feed into it hard, black, unpromising flakes, with nothing nourishing on them, that I see, out comes song and praise and jubilant harmony. For all I can tell you may hear the "flute, violin, and bassoon" all going at once, and the "casement jessamine" trembling "to the dancers dancing in tune." I am fully expecting to hear Maud one of these nights whispering

from the open window (more immediately out of this unpretentious cabinet that although the echoes have died away on, sand and stone, she will never come into the garden; and that he is an arrant fool to think that his dust will in a hundred years or a thousand "blossom in purple and red 'neath her feet'.—I shall never express surprise at anything, that may come out of that box, when it is opened.

Had I a better memory,—must say there are things I find not so easily forgotten—I should be able to tell you that charming Norse legend of Áslaug, the little girl in the harp. Or was she a maiden grown? All I remember is that there was a harp and a maiden and a minstrel. But I know that that harp breathed forth such strains as had never before fallen upon the ear of man, for its strings were attuned to the passions, pure and true, in Áslaug's heart; when she wept they were tremulous with tears, when she was blessed with the joy of living peasant and king, queen and beggar maid danced and carolled, till they were so tired, that a stone would have given them sleep as soft, as ever came to a pink princess, resting on a feather pillow with silken covers. The old minstrel undoubtedly thinking all the while that he was playing them his merry tune.

It seems, that in early youth I was led to believe that Áslaug was dead; and that is my only plea for having forgotten the story. I

should have been sure to cherish and remember it all, if only I had known that she still lived, and would come to me another day with a new song. For that is the only way I can explain this magic. There must be, and I shall do myself the honor of borrowing the language of childhood, there must be, in that box, a really, truly fairy, sending out these nets of melody enmeshing our hearts, and bringing them to a fold, where they may nestle in trust and comfort.

If only no one had whispered to me, when I still was a happy lad, with stardust on my eyelids, that the fairies and the brownies, the seven dwarfs, the trolls and the goblins have no place in a grown up world. It would have saved much painful searching after the meaning of the things we call real. I don't understand why we should be dispossessed of these frolicking playmates and winsome comrades, only to be thrown into the darkness without, where we grope about and hurt our flesh, and bruise our soul.

## LETTER THE ELEVENTH

### ON LETTER-WRITING

Lying in the top drawer of the article of furniture I playfully call my desk, there are three or four letters; they have been there some for a week, some for a month perhaps. I suppose the day will come, when I overcome my indolence

and scribble a few lines on a sheet, sent it away and pretend to have answered these letters. In the meantime I try to think that letters were better never answered and never received. That, like dream children (you remember I have been reading Lamb), the unwritten letter is the best. There are such possibilities in unwritten letters. Such promise for those who never receive them.

I once knew a tired man;—a man who was so weary and in need of repose, that his spiritual advisers told him he must not, on any pretext, write more than one, or at the most two letters weekly. Nothing could have been more in accordance with his wishes, had he still been hurrying about in the big, busy world, imagining himself all the time to be one of the important cogs in the big wheel that makes it go on its tireless travels; but there in his little world, which seemed so useless, and fitting in nowhere, one letter or two appeared, at first, to mean starvation. Not that he wanted to write for his daily bread; but it seemed sort of murder, slow and painful, of the emotions.

But the feeling did not last long, for the days that are to come hold, like the unopened letter, the greatest promise. We never know what those days are keeping in store for us; and as they come, drab and gray, we can entwine them with thoughts of future sunshine and color, — sometimes we can. — But the unwritten letter. What fine messages that man got! Daily he

could think of this good friend or that, and build up long letters full of cheer and solicitude. He knew that "men must work and women must weep," and that out there, in the whirlpool of activity and strife, little time is found for dipping pen in ink, recording kindly thoughts; but still time aplenty for thinking them.

Probably some of the unwritten letters, which this man received, were untruthful. But I don't want to think they were. Yet when the reality is painful, why should we not hug the illusion? If you can warm your hands at the moon, by all means do. So as I think of these unwritten letters in my desk, I feel confident that the good friends who wrote them are better off while writing. No matter how low their expectations, they surely will find disappointment in the envelope when they open it. For there they will find something about as dull as this, and as spiritless.

## LETTER THE TWELFTH

### THE TERRIBLE SINCERITY OF THE MAD

If there is virtue in thoroughness, then I should be proud to think how well I have forgotten the few scraps of knowledge I picked up at school. Till last Sunday I thought there was only one small item in my memory since those far away years; when a wayward mood led me to turn over the pages of a handy little anthology, which



I keep near me for such emergencies; I was momentarily arrested by Browning's Porphyria's lover. The poem startled up another. But of that later.

The one bit that often comes back to me I picked up in the course of attending lectures on Church History, or something to that purpose. I had been admitted, with a few other black sheep (we considering ourselves white lambs), to certain rights and privileges among a group of prospective dogma preservers. We did look forward to much excitement or entertainment in this fraternity, even with an aggressive young theologian as leader; but the unexpected happened. The man who, as far as I can judge, we paid for feeding us with facts, but not for assaults on our pet theories, rose as in wrath one day, and brought this cudgel down into the creed-crammed head of one of the firmer brethren: "You must remember, Mr. H., that orthodoxy is not synonymous with truth."

I conned over some Caesar in the class room, and solved a few problems in trigonometry; but I assure you, that apart from some boyish pranks, this was the only dramatic incident during some years of schooling. I cannot therefore forget it, and again and again comes to me the question, why we insist so vehemently on clinging to our "little hoard of maxims" instead of boldly launching forth seeking eternal verities. Probably because we live in a world so compact of confu-

sion and chaos. So Porphyria's lover found it.

There was in our school a quick and fiery man, who so far forgot the dignity of his position as professor of literature, as to display genuine emotional appreciation of poetry. Must say in extenuation of this circumstance, that he did not fall very often, and that other professors of poetry have been detected in similar lapses from the decorous. He was, what I aspire to in a humble way, an admirer and lover of Browning; but his was the happier love, for he seemingly understood the poet; at least he never failed to explain away the difficulties; — never, except when the class failed to bring them before him. — But this is rambling. He, I now recall, told us that Porphyria's lover was mad, and no fit companion for a tender, flaxen-haired maiden.

Now, that I am under no obligation to accept the theories of my betters, I doubt if Browning would have taken his oath before judge and jury, that the lover was out of his reason: Unless, indeed, all lovers are insane, of which I am no competent judge; or that the terrible sincerity of the mad is the true sanity.

Whatever Browning's purpose or whim in drawing with such lurid minuteness this ghastly picture, the drama there enacted seems in all truth to be a faithful portrayal of the world we live in to-day. The man who through these cataclysms of horror lives to see eternal wisdom

at work must be hard put to it. The sun rises in the morning over such deeds, "and yet God has not said a word."

## LETTER THE THIRTEENTH

### LARES AND PENATES VS. STEEL.

If my books don't play me false, the cloisters of old were the retreats of wise and studious men, who found there the leisure and quietude necessary for meditation and brooding over the past. To the world of a thousand years ago, that past loomed much larger before the vision than either a sin-befettered present or precarious future. But why retrace our steps a thousand years or a hundred? There are sundry momentous rumblings in the air to-day, proceeding from out of far Russia. These many will interpret as a warning to him who still refuses to gird his loins to the task of to-day, and dedicate his life to the unborn years.

So the world goes apace, and we whose days are consumed in seclusion, and ofttimes in solitude, fear that, faring forth in the crowded marts of life, we shall, like Rip Van Winkle, find an unknown and unknowable folk.

What foolish fears to entertain! To get away from the present, one would have to hide at the North Pole. And would the hermit be safe there long?—I have no desire to travel to

that far clime; and like to think that I am observing the aspirations and achievements of my fellows. But why should I, for all that, try to forget and affect contempt for my part, surely as much a part of me as next week is? Think of life were every minute forgotten as it passes into eternity!

What will the young life, that is launching forth on the raging foams this year of grace,—or is it disgrace?—be facing a score years from now? Will all the lares and penates some of us are dying to cling to now be thrust from their altars, and the youth of the world be taught to bow in reverence before the monster efficiency, or the modern Gorgon steel? Or will it be schooled to bow before no man or beast or element, except the great beast spewing fire and clamoring for sacrificial blood on the long battle line?—The questions crowd in, but a kindly providence refuses to lift the veil which shrouds the future, (will we next, in the name of progress, demand to read the unwritten scroll?), and they pass unanswered.

A daily newspaper is a humdrum thing. But what a fine link with the present for a cloistered man! To-night, before taking up my pen, I read this in a favorite column, quoted there, I want to believe, with a heavy hand: "The schoolboy of the future, will know more about the use of the gasoline engine than he will know about the capes and bays of the African coast. The school-

girl will have a clearer idea of the chemistry of a the family milk bottle, and the mechanism of a typewriter than she will about the cube root or Greek mythology."—Quite likely! Quite likely! But why boast of it?

## LETTER THE FOURTEENTH

### THE TRAVELLER AND THE ANGEL.

The Traveller was on the highway. He had come from out of the mists; and he did not know where he was going. But the sun was hot and his limbs grew tired. Then he met the Angel. The Traveller did not know that the stranger sitting on a stone in the shadow of a great rock was the Angel; and he sat him down in the same grateful shade, drying the moisture on his brow. But the Angel spoke to the Traveller and said:

"This road is hard and dusty, and you have come far. Come with me." And he pointed to the path leading off the main road.

The Traveller wondered at the Angel's voice; for in it there was authority and power.

"Why should I come with you, stranger? What have you to offer that a Traveller should leave the highway and venture into unknown by-paths?"

"He who goes with me must learn at the journey's end what my hospitality has to offer."

"Will there be no toil nor labor; and will my

couch be soft, and my parched lips know thirst no more?"

"It shall be even so. Come!"

"Will there be no tears nor sighing; and no parting of those who are happy together?"

"Never. But come!"

"Will there be no yearning after the forbidden, nor strife for the unattainable?"

"There is a land, where dreams are a promise, and visions a covenant. We go there. But hasten, for the shadows lengthen."

The Traveller looked up at the sky, and down at the earth. Dark-blue clouds were rising, and a breeze came from across a thousand fields, laden with odors of the fruitful soil, and with tidings of the belated rain.

"Why should I hasten? Is there patter of kindly drops against my window panes; and a million sparkling leaves, dancing in the sunshine?"

"I am not allowed to tell."

"Do birds carol; and children smile, and mothers pray?"

"Ask no questions. I go; and you must come, or our ways are parted."

"Stranger, will there be neighborly fellowship; the melody of loving voices in our ears, and friends to greet our arrival and bless our departure?"

"These questions will be answered; but not now. Are you coming with me?"

The Angel rose to go. The Traveller lifted up his eyes to the rising bank of clouds, and his lips ached. Then he spoke.

"No, I stay here."

When he turned the Angel had departed. The Traveller buried his face in his hands. He waited.

## LETTER THE FIFTEENTH

### THE IDLER QUILTS THE CLOISTER

As the years roll by we look back half wistfully to many a pleasant episode of the days when we were still willing to experiment endlessly; and not afraid to hold on to the candle till the flame flickered out between our fingers. Some of us were merely scorched; others, more reckless, held on long enough to have a scar to hide. But some gain a measure of wisdom with age; and others prematurely in pain and grief. I cannot help thinking humanity is aging a century each year now.

But I am losing my way, for what I intended to say has to do with letter writing. Many of ~~pleasanter youthful adventures were fruitful in~~ that innocent amusement.—You know how these things go! We pick up friends, friends pick us up. There are numerous notes and letters for a few months, or perhaps a year or two; and then you lose interest or your friend does. If

you feel that you are responsible, there is a faint regret; probably chiefly at the way things have of slipping from one's grasp, and out of one's control. I usually feel guilty of neglect; although the remembrance of how most of my friends have forgotten my address shortly after, or shortly before, taking unto themselves new responsibilities and pleasures greatly soothes my conscience.—If my married friends find time once in five years to send me a picture of the latest born, I can muse for hours on the constancy of human friendship.

Now we are always taking the longest way round to reach the port!—I should have started by saying that it was with no little regret that I felt the interest in these brief letters slipping from my grasp last winter. Then a combination of circumstances made it seem impossible to go on. It is to grind one's teeth! For was not man born to battle against circumstances—and conquer?

In passing it may be worth while telling you that this letter and some that are to follow are not written within the pleasant place I facetiously named "The Cloister." Yet the truth is served equally well retaining the old heading: for the monastic vow did not primarily indicate a body chained to a rock, but a soul dedicated to an attitude in human relationship.



# LETTER THE SIXTEENTH

## THE SPARROWS

I have no doubt that poets are privileged, not to say superior, beings; and that to them is the sight of light that never was on land or sea; also of gloom. Due in all possibility to a vanishing, but yet somewhat potent, awe, which the very name of parson or magistrate inspired in young children, back in my native parish. I still cherish a decent regard for my betters. But the sparrows in the eaves have disturbed my faith in the poets. Also in the priests.

Strangely enough, these two have ever assumed an attitude of hostility. Very strange: for fused in one personality the priest's zeal and the poet's vision give prophets to the race. But the poet and the priest have lifted their voices in unison proclaiming that all nature is innocent and blissful and forgetful of self; all but that tearful wretch, man. Skylarks are ever skylarking. Nightingales know no greater joy, besides their nightingaling, than giving up a promising morsel to a stray guest.—How I should like to think there is such bliss and brotherliness in birdland! But why, then, these quarreling sparrows in our maple here? They fight, not in amiable family groups, but in fives and sixes, each vying with the other in savagery. And the language they use!

It is their detestable swearing I find hardest

to endure. I must confess that an occasional outburst of expletives does not hurt my ear so very badly, coming from a sixfooter, who has been using a razor for years. We all know that steam engines are provided with safety valves. But I am quite sure there are mothers of infants in these disgraceful squabbles; yes, and children, too.

So, when the fight is over, and before the next one begins, I don't turn to my book again, but allow myself a few minutes' pause to wonder. Not much comes of my wondering. Only this: That if the eider mother, to shelter her brood, plucks her feathers from her breast, till her life blood stains her tortured flesh: so much the more will a Rachel do for her children. This: That if the nightingale, lost in rapture, breathes forth deathless song; then, also, does man know moments, when his lips find no words befittingly to praise the beautiful in life, and the goodly gift of life itself. This: That if the lark soars to the gates of heaven; then, also, does man know hopes and aspirations towards nobler endeavor, beyond the narrow prison house of time and space.

---

## LETTER THE SEVENTEENTH

### MORALITY—AND OTHER THINGS

I have made two remarkable discoveries. One of them is of a private nature, and if I had not

before this generously exposed a good many of my personal vanities and foibles I should keep it to myself. Not so the other. Science is to me a great and awesome mystery. I have never hoped to master the least of its—or is it her?—intricacies. But the second discovery must be of scientific interest, and should therefore be given to the world.—First a word to the scientists, then. They may not believe me, but I am quite sure the sparrows,—the very same birds I spoke of in my last letter—can read. They must have been perching in the maple behind me last week and read every word as I wrote.—Likely you have forgotten that I was bewailing their fighting proclivities. Since taht day I have failed to discover one single battle. What better proof is needed that the little tricksters can read?

That brings us to my other discovery, which follows from this scientific one: At last someone has derived moral benefit from my rambling notes. — A most gratifying reflection, indeed. Most gratifying. I am almost constrained to spend some of my leisure moments drawing up a code of morals for sparrows and other winged creatures.

Without doubt this would be a highly edifying task. But fortunately there are sundry reasons why it will never be attempted. To begin with, I understand these things are all done by saints. I plead guilty to having had designs on a member—

ship in that proud fraternity in my youth; but it is now many a year since the desire to possess a halo died a painless and natural death, and now I would pray to be delivered from that affliction. — Then I have rude misgivings respecting codes of morality. There are moments when I would erase the word, and its every-day humdrum connections, from my dictionary and my memory. In these wild moods I would throw the law and the prophets over board, and believe there is no right or wrong, and that we are nothing more than pawns on the great chess board of life.

But these are dark and fearful musings. Man was born to obey higher laws than predatory instincts. Yet morality must be something that cannot be learned by rote like a multiplication table, or even pencilled on a stone tablet: an emotional quality; a state of grace.

## LETTER THE EIGHTEENTH

### THE SMITHY

There is a blacksmith's workshop across the street. I cannot see it from our verandah, but at intervals throughout the day I hear the measured ring of the hammers on the glowing iron, the anvil joyfully responding at every blow. How happy the anvil always is! And the more he is beaten the merrier his song. Probably it is

the proud joy of the craftsman at his task which re-echoes from the anvil.

I am often tempted to cross over and see what is going on inside. It is not alone the joyous, hearty song of the anvil calls me, I can hear that from my peaceful corner; but I want to see what they are shaping and fashioning from cold, formidable bits of steel and iron; to watch these hard nuggets go into the fire, and come out in a minute pliant and tractable, obeying with quick impulse the thoughts of their master, the smith.

It is all as wonderful as a tale from Arabian Nights.

But chiefly I wish to go there to breathe again the odor of hot iron and glowing coals on the forge, and see the flying sparks. What a homely wish, exclaim. Probably. But stop.

Somewhere I have read that the sense of smell has a more retentive memory than his brothers. It is now many years since I arrived at the critical period in life when a man ceases to believe everything in his books, but not one of us but has often suddenly stopped when a stray odor was wafted toward him. Has stopped to ask himself where and when his nostrils were thus regaled before, and mayhap a long chain of deeply buried memories of childhood come out of hiding to cheer and bless.

Probably it would be superfluous, or even disappointing, to visit the forge and the ringing

anvils; for the other day the wind did waft to me faint odors of hot iron and glowing coals on the forge. The pictures it conjured up! No, the transfixation it achieved: transmigration of soul. —I was a small boy standing before my grandfather's little fire on the big, unhewn stone forge, behind which heaved like a troll's chest the huge sheep-skin bellows. A very small boy, indeed, it was, pulling at the end of a cord, who made these giant lungs puff and groan; but after all these years how happy and carefree, if perchance tired.

But words are not companionable to-day, and some other time I must tell you more about that worthy old man, my grandfather, and his ancient smithy.

## LETTER THE NINETEENTH

### REFLECTIONS

In the picture brought by that puff of breeze from the glowing iron and hot coals on the forge I saw my grandfather as he was some twenty years ago; then in the prime of life at seventy. Probably the clearest part of this picture were the hands: short, stubby fingers and thick pads of muscles, one grasping the sledge hammer, the other long iron tongs whose muzzle is snugly buried in the cinders and coals. I know what they hold in their grim teeth; a half-shaped horse

shoe. Soon comes an order for the bellows to stop. I step back from the anvil, but not too hurriedly, lest I betray fear; out comes the iron, almost white, and down comes the hammer; once, twice: cling, clang; cling, clang. At the first volley of smithereens the little boy involuntarily puts up his arm to protect his face. He knows the action shames his years and his dignity; but it is still impossible to check the impulse.

My grandfather was a farmer, as his ancestors had been for centuries before him; and as I hope the majority of his descendants will be for centuries after him. As a craftsman he was working under a great handicap, his father having lived and worked with him till both were old men; the senior always doing the fine work. It was therefore quite like that no one who had reached the barren zone of cynicism ever admired his handiwork. To the little chap at the bellows his wisdom seemed uncanny.

The humble task of horseshoe making seemed to assume with him something of the dignity of a solemn rite. Especially starting the fire. He liked to work the bellows himself till there was an inviting, cozy bed of coals. Then to the iron. The bar was long or short according to the time of the year. Taking this he placed his thumb carefully at the end, then running his forefinger along the bar, with a chisel made a mark near the end of his span. Soon the cold chisel was at

work and off came the desired length. Modestly I ask:

"What are you going to make now, granddad?"

"A shoe for Blackie's left hind foot," comes in a kindly tone the brief answer.

Then he cuts a second piece, and while the third is being cut I play with the first two, and notice that one is a little longer than the other. My enquiries bring the curt answer that the second is for Blackie's right hind foot.—How he knew the size of every hoof on every one of our six or eight ponies passed my understanding. It still does, and I am glad to confess it.

Another mystery was how he always knew when the iron in the fire was ready. I wished to know then, and have devoted some time to the question since. But it still remains a mystery.

FINIS



HERE, then, endeth the "Leaves From the Unwritten Note-Book of an Idler," together with "Letters From the Cloister to the Hearth," as written by Baldur Jónsson and first published in "The Wynyard Advance," now done into enduring print by the Advance Printers at their shop at Wynyard,  
Saskatchewan, MCMXVIII.